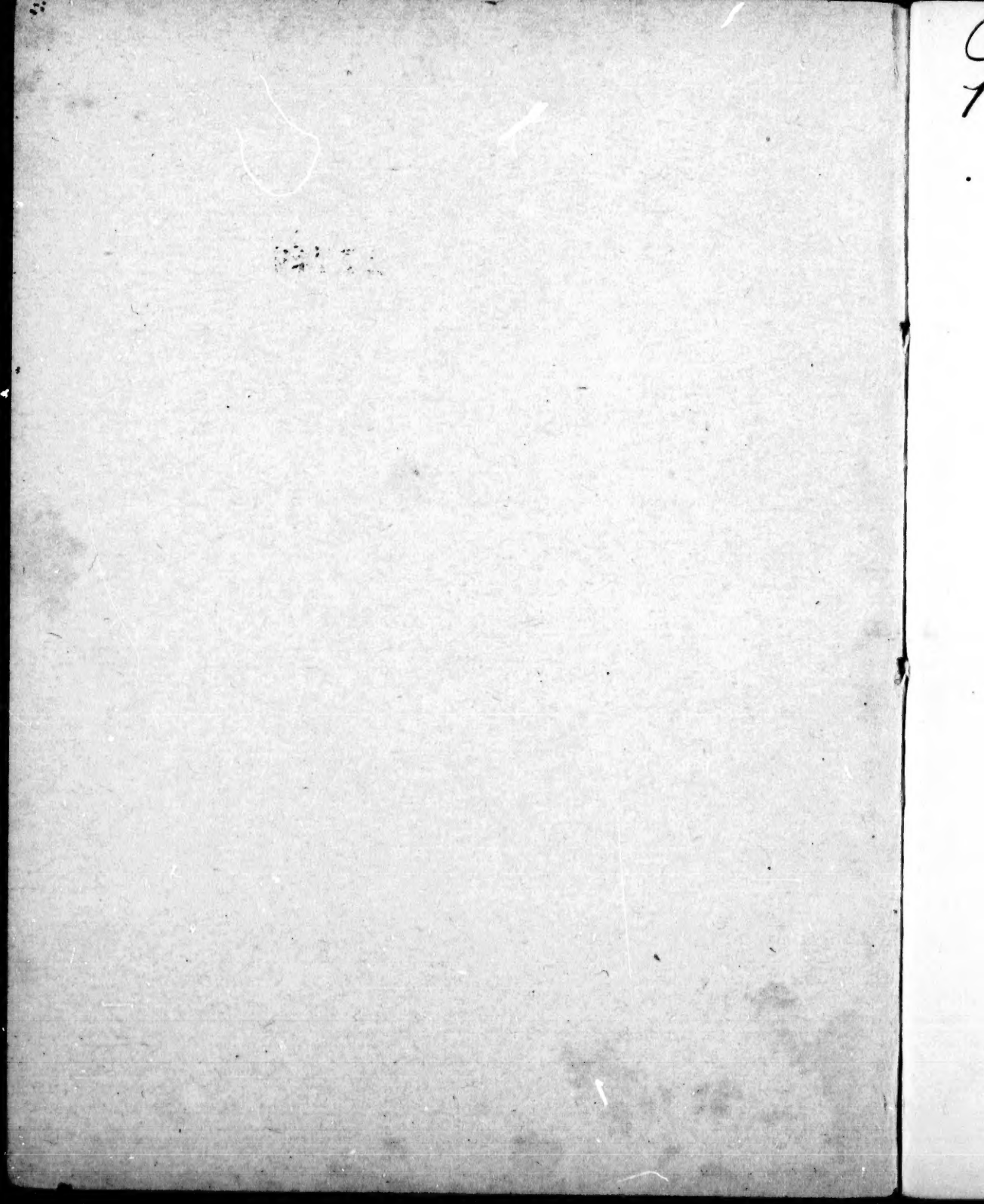


# WILD OATS

BY

REV. JOSHUA DENOVAN.

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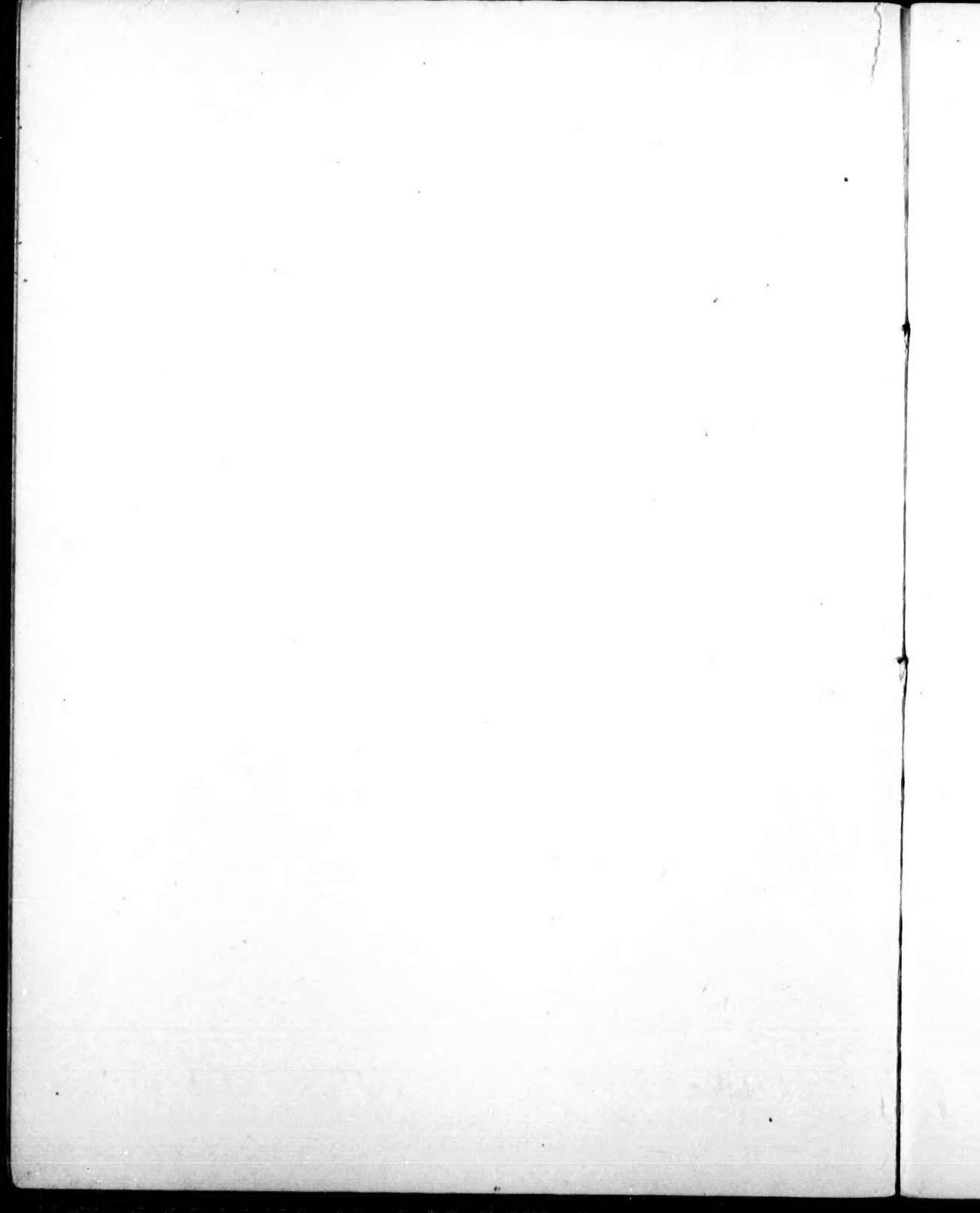
WITH PREFATORY NOTE

BY

REV. ELMORE HARRIS, B.A.



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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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**I**N the following tract our esteemed friend, Rev. Joshua Denovan, discusses in his own forcible style the subject of popular amusements. That many of these are hurtful to the spiritual life, and a hindrance to the winning of souls, are facts deplored by every earnest Christian. Notwithstanding the plain, apostolic commands, "Be not conformed to this world," "Abstain from all appearance of evil," every faithful minister of Christ finds it necessary at times to give no uncertain sound regarding amusements and practices of doubtful propriety. These are not only prevalent in modern society, but they are finding their way into the churches of Jesus Christ. It is sincerely hoped that the circulation of this little treatise will show their baneful influence; and especially that Pastor Denovan's able presentation of the subject will impress on many minds and hearts the solemn truth that "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

ELMORE HARRIS.



## WILD OATS.

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**W**ITHIN the boards of that most wonderful of all books, called THE BIBLE, there is no passage that claims more serious consideration from every one of us, but more especially from the young in this very fast age, than the one reading thus : "*Be not deceived ; God is not mocked : for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but He that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*"

Light-hearted youth may treat with mirthful mockery the maxims inculcated by mature wisdom—may dismiss with a little gentle ridicule even the affectionate admonitions and warnings of a parent ; but God cannot be thus handled. All nature in all ages, all human experience in all lands, has preached this immutable verity



times without number: "*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*" For any one of us to slight or ignore or even forget this fundamental doctrine is nothing short of suicidal self-deception. For any one of us to live, speak or act on any other principle than that which these plain words enunciate is daringly to mock the God who has elsewhere declared that He will render unto every man according to his deeds. We may, under the euphonious title of Ethical Truth, formulate wonderful theories and very plausible theories of our own invention, but the awful words I have written above will ultimately crush them all to dust, and scatter them to the winds. Upon this point of law the Supreme Judge will make no charitable modification or concession. Upon this particular principle He will tolerate no pleasantry. "WHATSOEVER A MAN SOWETH, THAT SHALL HE ALSO REAP."

Some time ago I lighted upon a very striking and impressive illustration of this sentence. Walking leisurely along a country road, my attention was attracted by a field of grain nearly ripe (for it was August), sown partly with



wheat and partly with oats, nearly half and half—two heavy crops, yet sown so very carelessly at the places where the two descriptions of grain met that I, for lack of definite explanation, concluded that the man who farmed the land must be some erratic agricultural genius, not a little original in his ideas and methods.

When I noticed the field in this my first visit to the spot the oats appeared to be fully ripe, and the wheat barely so, and I said to myself, "The sooner those oats are cut the better, as they won't improve by wilting another day in the hot sun." Judge of my surprise when, after two or three days more of cloudless sunshine, I discovered that all the wheat had been suddenly cut and carted away, while the oats, now drier than kindling wood, were still waving in the warm summer breeze. Being accompanied by a friend this time, we ventured inside the fence to inspect this inexplicable crop more closely, when I discovered that this promising patch of oats had literally no grain on its stalks. Every head I laid hand upon was a luxuriant display of ripened "hulls," as the country folks call them—empty husks and dry chaff—nothing

more, waving in the zephyrs of harvest time. "Why," exclaimed I, "if I ever saw such a performance as this! these oats have been allowed to become so much overripe that all the grains must have fallen to the ground." "Look here," said my friend to a big country boy who had sauntered over in our direction, "Can you tell us what has happened to these oats?" "Them's wild oats, sir; they never had no grain in them. Never pay nobody to cut them," Yes, indeed, there grew before us a large and vigorous crop of genuine wild oats, the veriest and most unblushing hypocrites of the vegetable kingdom I ever beheld.

Of course I had often heard of this vile weed. Once or twice, perhaps, my attention had been directed to a few stray stalks in the neglected corner of a field here and there. I remember also of having been told how quickly this weed asserted itself, and how vigorously it spread if not rooted out at its first appearance. All this I had heard incidentally without giving much heed to the tale, but the sight now before me startled me.

"Did these wild oats show a crop like this

last year?" I asked the boy. "No, sir; there was not more'n a few biggish patches here and there, last year; but them wild oats grows up and spreads terrible; and nothing'll kill them except pulling out by the roots before they ripen. But that man will now be forced to summer-fallow this field steady for about four years, and even then I guess he'll have tough work in getting clean rid of them."

The deplorable spectacle, and the pointed rustic comment thereon, set me thinking; and I am sure I must have remembered this passage from Paul's pen as I sauntered away back home: "*Be not deceived; God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*"

Wild oats! Several times I had heard, as I have already said, about this vegetable pest, but there in that field it triumphantly stood before me, rejoicing in its victory, and ready to produce a crop five times—perhaps ten times—the size the following autumn.

Many a time, especially in my youth, have I heard young men talking glibly and wittily about vice as "sowing wild oats." Long ago, I have more than once read amusing and

thrilling stories about heroes and heroines who "sowed wild oats." Nay, more than once or twice have I overheard matrons and maidens joking and giggling over certain fast young gents in their courses of extravagance and dissipation as only "sowing their wild oats," usually ending the interesting chat with mutual assurances that they would, no doubt, soon sober down, and perhaps even turn out better men as the result of their wild escapades and bitter experiences.

Alas! alas! that this sowing to the flesh should be turned into fun—that it should be used as the exhilarating spice of story-books which are read in respectable and even religious homes—that it should be condoned and extenuated by virtuous mothers and hopeful daughters! Surely many of us do not know, or we must have forgotten, that these terrible words stand in the New Testament—those who "sow to the flesh" daringly "*mock* God!"

In not a few instances I have watched the course of sin's development in young people; and, oh! with what rapidity the crop of vice crept over the soil of the entire life, gradually

choking off the good wheat of early virtuous training and all the delicate flowers of simple, adolescent beauty—yes! until I have beheld the wild oats waving without disguise or shame in the open daylight of every-day life.

In saying this, I am not speaking in the vague and general terms of a moral reformer. I can detail particulars in the history of several of my early friends—some of them well-educated and comparatively affluent—who were debased by sin, and then swept away by early death. About those youths I can distinctly remember these two things: *first*, their ruinous sins began with habits and customs tolerated in respectable society and in religious homes; and *secondly*, they were in the habit of speaking glibly and cheerily about “turning a new leaf,” etc., “after our wild oats are sown; ha! ha!” To me, that “ha! ha!” of reckless and hopeful merriment sounds now in the tones of the devil’s voice. Poor fellows! they became wild oats *themselves*—poor, deluded sinners, held fast in the relentless grip of their vicious passions, and thus were dragged irresistibly down to death. O God of sovereign grace! what but the power

of Thine omnipotent Spirit hath made me to differ! It was—was it not?—the saintly John Bradford who, when happening to see a poor criminal led from the gaol-door to the gallows, exclaimed, “There goes John Bradford, but for the grace of God!” That is my devout confession as I look back and see some of my early acquaintances passing down to their early graves.

Sin encouraged, simply because it behaves somewhat respectably—vice tolerated, because it behaves itself genteelly, and appears somewhat interesting—“wild oats,” politely indulged simply because they look fairly well and are sometimes funny, and are neither disgusting nor dangerous in themselves, will all work ruin. Our moral nature won’t stand still a moment. In that soil the weeds of sin, if not ruthlessly uprooted, will grow and multiply. “Wild oats” *simply neglected*, will very soon cover the entire field of the soul with a crop of strong, masterful straw—each stalk of straw crowned with barrenness, grim and hopeless as death. Aye, and human souls can get into this dismal condition after having been carefully cultured

by education, after having been fruitful in usefulness, and even fair and fragrant with virtues and graces of honest and amiable life. But, worst of all, there are men and women in all stations of society, who, although their whole nature is a field of worthless, wild oats, are selfish and sagacious enough to restrain themselves from sin's revolting and fatal excesses, and who live on politely and most winsomely, blighting society all around them. These are Satan's most successful instruments of evil—from year to year, sowing wild oats in the hearts and lives of several generations around them. But, oh, what a reckoning must await those whose long and prosperous lives have been such a protracted and successful curse!

Let us beware of those worthless weeds, plausible, pleasant-looking sins, harmless-looking wild oats. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." Beware of the very first few handsome stalks of carnal-indulgence and worldliness. Root them up, or they will very soon occupy the place of everything



better than themselves. "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die. If ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." Mortify—kill out the wild oats.

Does anyone desire me to describe more definitely what I mean by WILD OATS? Well, allow me to sketch a few.

### 1. The Theatre and the Opera.

I am not ignorant of the hundred and one plausible and even sensible arguments which can be advanced in favour of theatrical and operatic entertainments. Personally, I feel convinced that, under such management and restraints *as might be imagined*, histrionic art could be made an agency of very great educational value, and high-class music could become a refining, purifying and elevating power. But, practically, any such management and wholesome restraints have hitherto been impossible. For generations the theatre and, since its inception, the opera have been speculative enterprises, the object of which has been to make money. The refinement of the moral nature by pure music, the education of the mind and heart by living per-

sonification of remarkable and instructive historical character and conduct have been mingled and degraded and, in many instances, superseded by falsehood, rude fun and insinuating and suggestive vice. This is the kind of entertainments that draw and pay. Then, to suit the taste of those who most regularly attend, the hour of dismissal is so late as to destroy all domestic order and to make the day end in prayerless ungodliness. Whether we can furnish a sufficient reason for it or not, it is a fact which cannot be questioned that the Theatre, the Opera House and the Singing Saloon have been, and still are, the favourite haunts of bad men and base women: they are the resorts of the vain, the idle, the fast, the vile, the dishonest, the selfish and the dissipated. There can be but one reason why, viz., they furnish what is agreeable and delightful to the fallen flesh. "*He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.*"

## 2. Fashionable Dressing.

There is no reason why our dress should not be good in material and appropriately becoming

both in colour and in form. The works of God in nature—both in the animal and vegetable worlds—suggest that we ought to dress decently and modestly, and with refined taste; that the colours and shapes ought to be in such harmony with our persons and employments as will not distract attention, or foster vanity, or awaken envy.

If in this age and country true Christianity and pure morality have incumbent duties, one of them certainly is to discountenance and discourage fashionable, vain and selfish dressing. It is difficult to imagine anything more out of harmony with the personal example of Jesus Christ, and the plain teaching of the New Testament, than the display made in many Christian (?) churches, and in the social assemblies of professing Christians. What money wasted! What thought, ingenuity and energy utterly wasted! Then the subtle and unfavourable comparisons between one ostentatious display of vanity and another! Then the talk! Surely it is not uncharitable to classify such labourious and selfish vanity among Wild Oats. I think it something worse, for decidedly fashionable

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dressing is traceable to and gravitates towards "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." A fop is contemptible, and almost always impure in character. A young woman in the extreme of fashion is pitiable—likely worthlessly selfish. Neither the coquet nor the fop can (in the proper sense) be pure and good, except, indeed, they happen to be such shallow fools that even the vice of vanity cannot take root in them. Such mental shallowness may save *them* from serious moral harm, but their example is a deadly social cancer, eating away the nobler characteristics of all the young who may envy and emulate them.

### 3. Promiscuous Gatherings of Mere Worldly Company.

This is an age distinguished by the occurrence of such gatherings—big, popular assemblies, grand receptions and grand balls, masquerades, select dancing parties, *et cætera*. By such means young people especially are drawn together into pretty close intercourse—the virtuous and the vicious, the deceitful and base with the inno-

cent, the religious and irreligious, the infidel or agnostic and the believer. Thus those lines of distinction and separation which ought to exist are broken down. Where is the command of God plainer than in these words addressed to Christians, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate. Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? and what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" The weakest and most obtuse mind cannot fail to grasp what these pointed questions mean. They mean distinctly that Christians are to avoid "social" intercourse with the unregenerate, for such associations are disloyalty to Christ.

In favour of dancing as a healthy physical recreation for the young there are doubtless many good arguments, and I can easily admit that in certain circumstances, and under certain conditions, such physical exercise *might be* not only admissible, but even commendable. In broad daylight near the decline of the sun,

in the open air on the village green or smooth-cut lawn, the simple, hearty English country dance might be as healthy and virtuous an amusement and exercise as can be imagined or devised. For my part, I should be disposed to encourage young men and maidens in such hearty, healthy recreation. But *modern dancing*, with its late hours, its hot, unwholesome atmosphere, its demoralizing "refreshments," its extravagant and immodestly suggestive style of dress, its improper and questionable attitudes, must be emphatically condemned as fashionable vice, ruinous both to health and morals.

The Masquerade and the Carnival must be denounced as open traps and snares laid by the devil, with a daring effrontery that does even his infernal courage credit. Christian parents ought to resist the Masquerade and the Carnival at any cost.

#### 4. Card-playing.

Amongst the standard amusements resorted to by the ungodly, Card-playing now holds a favourite and important place. On this subject a word to the wise is enough. All the argu-

ments that can possibly be advanced in favour of Cards can never alter the historical fact that they lead directly to cheating, gambling, betting and vile company. They are "Wild Oats" of the Devil's own sowing. "The father of lies" is the patron of cards. A "euchre party" meeting once or twice a week is a domestic and social curse, blighting the sacred, quiet virtues of home life.

### 5. Novels and Romance Reading.

Methinks I hear, even from our church pews, a thousand voices raised in protest against my presuming to classify Novels among "Wild Oats."

Had we strength and patience to listen all day and all night long, plausible arguments would flow in upon us in favour of the moderate use of good fiction. When I ask, What kind of fiction is good? I immediately receive a list of books from The Pilgrim's Progress to Ben Hur and Titus, from Robinson Crusoe and The Vicar of Wakefield on to the library written by Walter Scott, and from that on to the library written by Dickens and Thackeray, and from



that on and on to the last choice morsel from the pen of Ian Maclaren, Haggard and Du Maurier. These compose a stock of reading enough to occupy every leisure hour of anyone's life, without allowing any time for current magazine novelles, or weekly newspaper stories. What am I—what are you to do with this list? Had we better not simply lay it aside, and use our precious leisure in the reading of simple, honest, unpervverted Truth? When we have exhausted the *true*, surely then it will be time enough to turn to the *sham* and fictitious. When we have secured our full crop of good grain, it will be time enough to amuse ourselves with a few "Wild Oats."

One thing is certain—acquire a taste for the stimulant of fiction and you will very very soon find it hard work to read with interest and profit substantial, honest truth. The tobacco smoker is a slave, the moderate drinker is a slave, the novel reader is a slave, whose appetite imperiously demands its stimulant; and, just to the extent such stimulant is used, the mental appetite loses taste for plain and wholesome diet. In spite of all the plausible

arguments that are now advanced by the press, and even by the pulpit, in defence of fictitious literature, it is unquestionably only "wild oats" occupying the place needed for something better. We cannot keep up our own conscious self-respect and promote the growth of a sound and fruitful morality unless we know that we are in fellowship with *truth*—thinking it and living it.

Novels are not always bad in quality. "Wild oats" are not, like the toadstool or the nightshade or the fabled upas-tree, poisonous. But "harmless" wild oats and "harmless" fictions occupy time and space and use up mind-force which none of us can afford to have occupied and wasted in such a way. For is it not an awfully solemn truth that you and I will go away out into eternity without having intelligently studied one-half of the Bible? Young people who are prosecuting their work at school or at college, young men and women who are earning their living in business, men and women who have assumed the responsibilities of domestic life, what time have they to waste on novel-reading? Not one of them in a thousand (and many of them members of churches, too)

has spent one solid week of all their lives in the serious examination of any evidences that the Bible itself is not an imposture, or that the Ch-istianity they profess is not a delusion as gross as Mohammedanism. And yet these people imagine they have leisure for reading fiction! The Lord open our eyes to see how the father of lies, arrayed like an angel of light—with the novel in his skilful hand—is now decoying thousands down to dark damnation!

Granted that many novels are not intrinsically bad. Neither are wild oats. They only occupy good soil that could hold a crop of good grain. They only absorb the sunshine and shower to no purpose.

### 6. Smoking and Dram-Drinking

are about the most effective methods of sowing wild oats that any young fellow can adopt.

“Smoking and drinking are not necessarily associated,” a hundred voices cry out in tones of righteous remonstrance. “Good fermented liquors are wholesome, and medicinally valuable,” cry out a hundred voices more. These two statements I will not dispute, but—. Well,

I have travelled far and seen much ; I have listened and observed attentively and candidly, and my conclusions upon this matter are thoroughly intelligent and very decided. I have noticed that all men who drink drams smoke, and that the majority of men who smoke seem to drink. I have noticed that in saloons where drink is to be had the atmosphere is laden with smoke, and that the young fellows that are sauntering and lounging about there smoke and spit, repeat vile jokes and blaspheme freely. Smokers generally slide into the company of smokers, and that company is idle and dirty-mouthed.

No man ever yet lit a cigar or pipe in hotel, steamer or railway carriage in order to promote his moral dignity, to improve his social position, to enlarge his intelligence, or to make his way into thoroughly good and pure society.

Young men in thousands have entered the road to ruin by the door of Tobacco-smoking. Tobacco and the saloon ; tobacco and the horse race, with its betting and cursing ; tobacco and the gambling hell ; tobacco and the house of ill-fame have always been intimately associated.

Just go into any country hotel, and notice who frequent the bar and loaf among the habitual loafers. Are they not all smokers? Then listen to the general conversation of the smokers, and what kind of remarks make them merry. Then carefully notice how those old and young smokers generally spend the Lord's Day, and then notice with whom young men who *never* smoke associate, and how *they* spend their Sabbaths.

Dram-drinking no one will attempt to defend whose opinion is worth anything. Dram-drinking is simply a process of slow but sure poisoning; the blood and the nerves, the brain and the character are debased and degraded by it. Indulgence in the use of alcoholic beverages is walking on the broad highway down to hell. Alcoholic liquors are distilled damnation. Poisons may be use medicinally under proper professional guidance, and so may wines and beers, brandy and whiskey. Smoking is also pernicious and degrading. The weed makes a man "weedy" both in body and soul. It is dirty, selfish and often dishonest.

Yes—*dirty*. Look around the floors or the

pavements near a party of tobacco-smokers, and feel the smell ! Enter a smoking car, and then—get out of its foulness as fast as you can !

*Selfish ?* Yes, abominably selfish. Just see how the smoker puffs his smoke where he knows very well it is not wanted—although he knows he is disgusting others by the foul odour of his breath. But what cares he ?—*he wants a smoke !*

*Dishonest ?* Yes. Smokers, every employer knows, often smoke away time that is not theirs—when the boss's back is turned. And as for the "genteel" smokers, everybody knows that good cigars are very dear—too dear by far for young fellows with extravagant tastes and small wages. Our city streets have been disfigured with glaring advertisements advising men to smoke "El Padre" (I think that is one of the brands), cheap at ten cents each ! Just think of it—three or four such cigars a day, in the strictest moderation costing, say, two dollars a week ; and that while probably the board bill, the tailors and shoemakers are begging in vain for settlement !

Without attempting to say anything now about how tobacco soothes into mental indo-

lence, and into moral obtuseness, or how it consumes precious leisure time (the most invaluable treasure anyone possesses), I must lay to its charge the serious crime of suicide. Every chemist can tell us that the essential oil of tobacco is poison—poison as powerful as arsenic or strychnine. The man who shortens his life by poison (were it only the last year or month of his lifetime) is unquestionably a suicide. The only excuse for the poor fellow is that he does not knowingly and intentionally shorten his life. The solitary apology for his crime is ignorance.

### 7. Sabbath Desecration.

In these days this species of "Wild Oats" is sown broadcast, while the people and the press applaud the crime. Is it indeed a crime to secularize the Sabbath? Read the fourth commandment of the Moral Law, and see. "But," cry ten thousand voices, "what have *we* to do with that old Moral Law?" I answer, solemnly, It is the only authoritative Law we have. Blackstone, accepted by all, on both sides of the Atlantic, as the highest authority



on national law, declares it the ultimate sanction of all social law—the foundation of enlightened civilization. If the fourth commandment of the Decalogue be not binding, who dare say that the remaining six are binding? If we can trample upon that Divine Authority by which every seventh day of our lives is sacred, we certainly can also trample upon the same Authority when it prohibits Theft, Murder and Adultery.

Of all delusions into which human selfishness has plunged, Sabbath desecration is one of the darkest! The one day in seven which Divine Love has mercifully given us, to think about our souls, and to prepare for a long eternity—that day shall we recklessly waste in pandering to this vanishing world, and this dying carcase? We demand idleness and recreation at the cost of railway and steamer employes, at the cost of hotel waiters and many others, compelling them to toil like slaves that *we* may wallow in selfishness. Oh, what unspeakable meanness is this!

The great God of heaven and earth has, by audible voice and by written law, commanded us to keep holy—*i.e.* to separate from a secular

to a sacred use—one whole day in seven. He has expressly prohibited the doing of any worldly work therein either by ourselves, our children, our servants or our cattle. Jesus Christ has distinctly declared that works of necessity and mercy alone are lawful on that day.

And yet civilized men and women (and many of them professing Christians, too) hesitate not to patronize railway trains, street cars, steam ferries and cabs on that holy day, and thus crush in the iron grasp of the most relentless tyranny, thousands of men who *must* desecrate the Sabbath, or loose their situations, who *must* be such slaves, or starve.

And what shall we say about elaborate Sunday dinners, about the printing and selling, the buying and reading of Sunday papers, and other species of modern slavery and sin?

Who can doubt that the restoration of the old Puritan Sabbath, with its beautiful quiet and simple religious worship, would be a priceless boon to any population! In comparison with that how wretchedly worthless are our incessant movement, bustle and noise, our running after

famous preachers and lecturers ; how degrading and hurtful all our boasted excursions and recreations !

### 8. The Lust of the Flesh

This, the worst and vilest of human vices, I dare no more than name. The unlawful indulgence of carnal passion in any form is simply toying with damnation, with physical and mental ruin, with moral and eternal destruction.

To call this supreme vice of ineffable selfishness " Wild Oats " is not correct. It is deadly poison ; it is the vilest shame. Would we see the picture of this vice ? Read Proverbs, chs. 2 : 16-19 ; 5 : 3-11 ; 6 : 20-28, etc. Now read 1 Corinthians 6 : 9, 10 ; Revelations 22 : 14, 15.

No words can be plainer or more terrible than these. The harlot and her paramour bear burnt into their souls and bodies the black brand of hell.

Just before leaving this revolting subject is it not right to enquire, to whom are these pestilent " Wild Oats " of impurity traceable ? To the harlot ? No, verily. Much as she is to blame, let her have justice. See yon military star at

the head of his brave regiment, or see that sleek and prosperous merchant, high in public esteem. It was that man who, when sowing his youthful "Wild Oats," flattered and courted a fair girl, lavished gifts and blandishments upon her, seduced and ruined her—all to gratify his brutal selfishness—then abandoned her to make her wretched living by seducing and ruining others. With this explanation, now behold the successful prostitute and her victims—young men by the score brutalized and diseased—gathering one by one at God's judgment seat. To whom is this crop of devil-tares traceable? To the blandishments and allurements of the debased woman? To the welcome her door offered to youth straggling home from club or theatre or ball at midnight? No, but her infamous traffic is ultimately traceable to that vilest of all villains whose unspeakable selfishness deceived and ruined, and then abandoned her to *earn her own living thus.*

Talk of "Wild Oats" such as that "gentleman" has sowed. What think you of the crop he has to reap at last? "*Whatsoever a man soweth, that....*"

Oh, if the eye of such a transgressor ever reads these pages, may he hasten to that blood which alone can cleanse from such awful sin, and then hasten away to rectify, as best he can, the unspeakable wrong he has done to that wretched woman and her victims.

Without further specifying those modern sins which are so common and which, with the solitary exception of the eighth named, both men and women palliate and defend, permit me to say that these practices and everything like them are "Wild Oats." Yes, against all arguments and apologies that can be advanced in favour of such things—to say the least of them, they are "Wild Oats."

The vegetable pest called "wild oats" has three characteristics, which, in these days are specially instructive and admonitory, particularly to young people who are now sowing in the soil of their moral and intellectual nature the crop they will soon have to reap. These characteristics are :

1. In all stages of *growth* the superficial appearance of "wild oats" is very fair, and even promising. There is nothing of the wild,

coarse weed apparent about them; but their daily growth resembles closely the development of healthy, useful grain, and (if not too critically inspected) they are certain to awaken the hope of abundant fruitfulness at the time of harvest. Is not this just exactly how many of these practices, pursuits and habits to which young people are now addicted appear? While, on the one hand, they cannot be commended as positive virtue, neither can they, on the other hand, be denounced and prohibited as shocking vice. There is only a shallow worthlessness about them; they are only an amiable and pretty method of wasting precious time and gratifying natural self-indulgence. Although it can never be claimed that they furnish any material out of which either a noble manhood or womanhood can be made, yet they are at least in apparent harmony with the accepted ideas of respectability and morality. And so, we just *let them alone*—generously, charitably, benevolently we tolerate them, and hope for the best. *Let alone*—the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye and the pride of life *grow* and multiply; and yet, they may to the last retain such a

fair, respectable, amiable *appearance* as to present no violent or repulsive contrast to genuine virtue and godliness.

2. Wild oats are self-propagating, self-culturing, self-sustaining. And is not this exactly what many of those small and agreeable whitish-grey sins do, which are so politely tolerated both in the home and the church?

They have only to be left to themselves, and *let alone* (as the farmer let alone the first few stalks of the wild oats that invaded one corner of his field) in the hope that they will likely gradually wear away; and, depend upon it, they will hold their own and spread. *Wild Oats don't wear away.* They must be uprooted and destroyed, or they will assert themselves.

Severe measures of extermination have only to be kindly or carelessly postponed; affectionate parents have only to wink at the irreligious habits and "recreations" of their boys and girls; mature Christians have only to refrain from any interference savouring of admonition or rebuke with those younger members of the church who are drifting into worldliness and



vanity—and the Wild Oats will vigorously grow and spread. As sure as the “enemy” Jesus spoke of is still alive, so surely will the crop of tares be kept vigorously growing side by side with the wheat of the kingdom.

Yes ; whatever that is not positively gracious and aggressively good has now its root and habitual growth in the warm hearts and strong lives of the young must be rooted up by deliberate and severe effort, and its place occupied by good seed growing vigorously, or the produce of these lives will be a bitterly disappointing failure—dry, wild-oat straw, only fuel fit for the fire.

3. “Wild Oats” are in a popular sense harmless. There they stand with nothing whatever repulsive in their appearance, with nothing chemically noxious in their nature—there they stand waving in the sunny breeze ! What fault can any reasonable person find with them ? These are their faults, and they are simply unpardonable : they occupy the limited space which precious, genuine grain might occupy ; and they draw from the soil, the atmosphere, the rain, the sunshine, all

their valuable qualities, while they make no equivalent return. "Wild Oats" are uninvited intruders and unproductive consumers.

Now, apply these remarks to our Soul-soil and our Life-energies in relation to the crop of "Wild Oats" some of us are carelessly raising.

What are our "harmless" dissipations doing? What effects upon ourselves and others are being produced by our thinking over and talking about the fashions, horse and boat races, and current social scandals? How does our reading of spicy fiction and suggestive comicalities, our attendance on funny lectures and popular concerts and circus exhibitions affect our moral nature? What results are we deriving from the associations we enjoy at our occasional games of whist and chess, billiards and skittles? Why—"No harm," you say, "but delightful, innocent relaxation." Is it so, indeed? Is it *no harm* to fritter away and fling away precious time, the season for our spirit's growth and education? and to leave for ever undone the duties God has imposed upon us, because the only available

space in our entire lives for them has been ingeniously but daringly pre-occupied by worthless amusements? Is it indeed *no harm* to use up (not earth chemicals, but) brain-power—to use up (not sunlight and ozone, but) the intelligence and affections of human nature to use up (not rain, but) vital blood—to use up all these divine gifts and endowments upon the cultivation of grainless Wild Oats for the coming harvest day? Is it *no harm* for persons, who have professed to be really converted to God, to spend evening after evening with unregenerated formalists, with polite agnostics and infidels, with genteel libertines, and thus put the endorsation of quiet friendship upon their conduct?

To give them due credit to the full, wild oats don't sting; they have no noxious poison in them; they don't disgust and sicken by the emission of gross and vile odours. In all these important respects they are certainly harmless. And some of us may unhesitatingly assert as much about not a few of the worldly and fleshly recreations and dissipations which are now so popular.

This I, for one, cannot grant. But, even if it were all granted, may they not still be a ruinous evil? I answer, Yes. Their evil, in many cases, consists not so much in their positive, but negative power; they take up and absorb for ever Time, Space, Powers, Opportunities that *are needed*, urgently needed, for far nobler and worthier objects. And, worst of all, it is our *leisure* hours they rob us of. In these days of keen business competition and redundant population, to earn a living a man—a woman—must give eight or ten hours of mind and nerve to daily toil; but, this past, then come the few pricelessly valuable hours in which our nobler nature can rise above the low level of mere animal alimentation—of working for money to buy food, clothes and fuel. Now, what, oh! what can I do to turn to the very best account these few leisure hours of priceless value? Shall I also give them up to my mere animal nature? Shall I invest still more of my soul in this vanishing world of sense and sin, while the big world of the eternal and spiritual is every moment coming fast, fast upon me? Am I sober? Am I sane? Then let me treat my

immortal spirit as if it were entitled to a fair share of my time and thought. After my day's work to my business or to my employer has been thoroughly done; after I have escaped from the anxiety and drudgery of my trade, what time have I now left to squander in games, in dances, in smoking and fiction-reading? Shall I dare to talk of "killing time"?

"O Time! than gold more precious;  
Yet more a load than lead to fools,  
And fools reputed wise."

4. There is coming fast upon us every hour the great Final Harvest day.

What possible reward from that Man Jesus Christ can any one of us expect for dressing expensively and vainly, for dancing and masquerading, for Sabbath desecration, for card-playing, dram-drinking, smoking and novel reading? These all are unquestionably mere fleshly gratification, mere self-indulgence. Now listen to what the Holy Spirit says about everything of that class:

"If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye, through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." "The flesh lusteth

against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh ; and these are contrary the one to the other." " They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit." " The carnal mind is enmity against God ; it is not subject to the law of God, neither can be."

" All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, are not of the Father but of the world ; and the world passeth away."

" BE NOT DECEIVED ; GOD IS NOT MOCKED : FOR WHATSOEVER A MAN SOWETH, THAT SHALL HE ALSO REAP. FOR HE THAT SOWETH TO THE FLESH SHALL OF THE FLESH REAP CORRUPTION ; BUT HE THAT SOWETH TO THE SPIRIT SHALL OF THE SPIRIT REAP LIFE EVERLASTING."

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Author, Title **Denovan, Joshua.**  
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